

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

Tad Beck: Eyes of

3/12/21 – 6/12/21

Grant Wahlquist Gallery is pleased to announce “Eyes of,” Tad Beck’s third solo exhibition with the gallery. The show will run from March 12 through June 12, 2021. Digital public programming will be announced at a later date.

“Eyes of” marks the debut of a new body of photographs with the same title, each of which is an abstract portrait of an artist whose vision has shaped or inspired Beck’s own. “Eyes of” continues Beck’s signature strategy of “re-photography”—creating images that are the product of an iterative process of taking pictures of pictures. For the initial exposure, Beck takes a still-life photograph of eyeglasses lent by the portrait’s subject against a checkerboard backdrop. He then prints out the still-life and re-photographs it through the glasses’ lenses and creates a new print. Beck repeats the process until the glasses are barely or not at all legible, each time experimenting with the lenses’ orientation and their distance from the camera’s lens. The resulting works are the largest abstract works Beck has made to date. While they clearly draw on a number of photographic precedents, from the multi-focus images of Jean-Luc Mylayne to the abstractions of Thomas Ruff and Eileen Quinlan, their soft, hazy shapes and washes of iridescent blues, greens, golds, and fuchsia reveal Beck to have a color field painter’s sensibility.

Beck selected the checkerboard pattern in a nod to optical tests, from Edward H. Adelson’s checkershadow illusion to Eleanor J. Gibson’s “visual cliff.” In the words of MIT’s Perceptual Science Group, Adelson’s checkershadow illusion “demonstrates the success rather than the failure of the visual system. The visual system is not very good at being a physical light meter, but that is not its purpose. The important task is to break the image information down into meaningful components, and thereby perceive the nature of the objects in view.” In other words, it demonstrates that certain “flaws” in human perception are actually necessary to the success of vision. Likewise, Beck’s addition of corrective lenses to the precision optics of the camera’s lens creates distortions that provide new visual possibilities that are ripe with surprise.

This exhibition includes nine works from “Eyes of”—the series is larger and remains ongoing—made with the gracious participation of Alison Hildreth, Andrea Zittel, Charles Atlas, Dean Sameshima, John O’Reilly, Michael Stipe, Nyeema Morgan, Sharon Lockhart, and Wayne Koestenbaum. As this selection demonstrates, the artists Beck approached are diverse and tied together primarily by his affinity or admiration for their practice. They are also linked together by one obvious fact: each requires corrective lenses. At its most basic level, art is about looking, and artists are our best lookers; in Beck’s hands, their glasses function as synecdoche not only for the uniqueness of their vision but also their existence as persons with histories, lifespans, and bodies. As all who wear glasses know, vision degrades and transforms over time, requiring new prescriptions for as long as one lives. In a surprising way, “Eyes of” participates in Susan Sontag’s proclamation that “[a]ll photographs are *memento mori*. To take a

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photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt."

Tad Beck received a B.F.A. in Photography from the School of Visual Arts, New York and an M.F.A. in Fine Art from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena. He lives in Vinalhaven, Maine. Beck's solo exhibitions include: the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Fisher Center at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson; Samuel Freeman Gallery, Los Angeles; Marisa Del Re Gallery, New York; Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York; and the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport. Two-person exhibitions include collaborative works made with the artist Jennifer Locke at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions and an exhibition with Diana Cherbuliez at Theodore:Art, Brooklyn. His work has recently been featured in group exhibitions at: the Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, Maine; the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut; the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockland; FotoFest, Houston; Spritmuseum, Stockholm; the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts; the Portland Museum of Art, Maine; and the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts. His work is in the collections of the Addison Gallery of American Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Princeton Museum of Art; the Portland Museum of Art; the Wadsworth Atheneum; and the Worcester Art Museum.

The gallery is located at 30 City Center, Portland, Maine. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm, and by appointment. For more information, visit <http://grantwahlquist.com>, call 207.245.5732, or email info@grantwahlquist.com.